

“We will give thanks to the Lord
with our whole heart; great are
the works of God!” AMEN!

Phew! We made it!

I mean, if you’ve been following along
the last month or two of gospel lessons,
it has been really hard to say,

“Praise to you, O Christ,” after the
reading of the gospel.

But we can say that clearly and
with a loud voice,
“Praise to you, O Christ!” :-)

It was way back at the beginning of summer (June 26)
when in Luke 9 we were told that Jesus
turned his face toward Jerusalem and
then encountered an inhospitable
group of Samaritans.

They refused shelter to him and
the disciples on their way through.

Since, in our readings between then and now,
it is as if Jesus and

the disciples wandered.

Did they get lost?

Was it like a mini-wilderness experience,
similar to the Israelites in Exodus where
they went around and around in circles?

It wasn't wasted time...

We had valuable teaching in the wandering.

But it makes us wonder if Mary Magdalene might
have been the voice of reason when she asked
if they should stop and ask for directions? :-)

But only to hear Peter say,
“No, I think this trail looks familiar-
I know the right way to go.” :-)

Kids won't know the humor in that
made up scenario because
there's GPS now and families don't
get lost anymore out of
stubbornness or pride from dad. :-)

Or do we? (HA!)

There are a few things of particular importance

for us today in this encounter Jesus had
with ten lepers.

The first one has to do with geography. (Hm)

The text said they were “On their way”
through the region
between Samaria and Galilee.

The in-between places of geography,
they are often insignificant places in our minds
as we like to look at where we’ve been
and where we are going, but
neglect being aware of
the in-between.

We are reminded here that in these
liminal spaces of in-between we often
have God encounters.

Delays, longer than expected journeys,
the chance encounter at the grocery store
just to pick up an item
all have significance when we
pay attention to what God is up to
in the liminal spaces. (Pause)

Now, Jesus is in an in-between region and
he heard 10 lepers shout out to him.

While outside of town, they called to Jesus
because they weren't allowed to live in town
because of the disease,
they lived on the edges.

Marginalized people that lived on the borderlands.

Borders in terms of geography but also
in the borderlands of survival.

Existing between life and death each day.

Lepers relied on other people's charity to survive,
but they also relied on one another.

We will come to find out that
these who struggle to survive aren't
as concerned with the same things
as the so-called "healthy" are.

Vulnerable people don't have
the luxury of worrying about mixing
with different nationalities.

When one is desperate,
what does it matter if you're
Galilean or Samaritan, right?

So this mixed community of hurting people cried out
to Jesus and what did he do first?

“He saw them.”

Those three words are so important.

“He saw them.” (Huh)

You likely do not have leprosy, but you know
what it is like to be less than.

To feel insignificant,
to be in a position at work where you
fly by the set of your pants pretending
to know what the heck’s going on...

Covid brought so much of that to our lives.

You have been in the in-between
spaces of good health and of
questionable health.

Maybe it’s been living paycheck to paycheck
hoping something unexpected doesn’t
happen to your only source of transportation.

Or to live in Florida,
with a hurricane on its way,

wondering if it will turn toward you or
away from you.

In one way or another, all human beings,
encounter liminal (in-between) spaces and
in them vulnerability.

And today, we encounter simple assurance.

That Jesus sees us.

Sees us and sends us and,
on that journey, heals us,
but that is not the end of it.

No, no, no...

Jesus on the borderlands and in
the ambiguity of landscape and temple,
teaches even more...

Remember the lepers were sent by Jesus
to go show themselves to the priests.

That's in accordance with Leviticus,
show yourselves to the priests,
so that the healed can re-enter society.

It was the first step to take

to get back to their lives.

This is not a story about Jesus squaring off
with priests trying to show himself up to them,

but more of a lesson that he knew
the rules of the Old Testament law and
he was just fine in sending them to
the place where God shows up...
in the temple and synagogue,
in the presence of the priests.

But there is an unexpected link that
we even forget sometimes... Jesus reminds us that
there are links between worship and gratitude.

Most of us know, deep down,
that we come with thankful hearts to worship,
but can get distracted with duty or clothing
or numbers in church or songs or
the prayers or pastor's hair
(had to throw that one in). :-)

But you get the picture, right?

Worship is always linked to gratitude,
we must be reminded of this.

That is the big deal about this one leper

who returns to Jesus.

It wasn't just him who was healed,
but ten called for help
to get back in touch with life,
family and faith.

And all ten received it, but only
one returned to give thanks.

Our translation writes it as
“He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet
and thanked him.”

That is he fell face down at Jesus’ feet,
and thanks Jesus,
but “thanked” should not be past tense.

It is in the present perfect in the Greek.
Not a once and done!

I know word geek! :-)

But it matters...

He fell at Jesus’ feet *thanking* him. See the difference?

A constant state of gratitude.

That's enough to bring us to dance and
raise hands in worship.

Not to be showy but as a reflection
for our constant state of
thanking God.

Gratitude and celebration...

The disciples that day saw the
best example of gratitude from Jesus'
healing and it came from a foreigner;

Luke kind of mentions it out of hand,
but it was an outsider that glorified God
and came back to
Jesus thanking him.

Here's another aha!

The Greek word for "thanking" here is "Eucharistone."

The word from which we get, Eucharist.

We think of the Eucharist as a
means of grace for us
to receive and it is!

Yet, participating in the Eucharist is also

a way for us to give thanks...
a constant thanking of Jesus'
healing, love, and new way of life
that brings us back
to the feet of Jesus. (Pause)

Beloved of God,

In the times when we forget... or become distracted-
don't despair, don't give up.

God is at work in the world even when it
feels like 90% of the people fade away without
a word of thanks.

In the unmapped places,
God is present.

In the in-between,
God is there.

And that is good news,
that is the gospel, let us now be the 10%,
let us celebrate with continued thanksgiving!

AMEN!